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GOING (NEO)BAROQUE THE FOREMAN WAY: A CASE STUDY OF *PANIC! (HOW TO BE HAPPY!)*

Abstract. *Panic! (How to Be Happy!)*, Foreman's 2003 theatrical "piece," written, directed and designed by the playwright himself, tests the conventional limits imposed by both the characters' bodies and the very structure of the theatrical stage. The present article proposes to re-appraise this composition as a new form of a theatrical work, that is, not a purely avant-garde or neo-surreal play, but a (Neo)Baroque dramatic phenomenon only seemingly restricted to and framed by the principles of spatial geometry. By celebrating the idea of fragmentation through the construction of the play and its short dialogues, and by accentuating and cherishing the creative potential of linguistic and set-design "rubbish," Foreman encompasses in his work both the (Neo)Baroque and surreal art, and transforms them into an altogether new category. I shall call that new type of a dramatic creation a (Neo)Baroque play.

Keywords: (Neo)Baroque; American theater; Richard Foreman; Off-Off Broadway; Wunderkammer; rubbish theory

(NEO)BAROK WEDŁUG RICHARDA FOREMANA, CZYLI *PANIC!* (*HOW TO BE HAPPY!*)

Abstrakt. Panic! (How to Be Happy!), sztuka z 2003 roku napisana, wyreżyserowana i zaprojektowana przez Richarda Foremana, bada możliwości odrzucenia konwencjonalnych ograniczeń narzucanych przez ciała bohaterów, jaki i samą strukturę sceny teatralnej. Niniejszy artykuł proponuje zastosowanie nowego paradygmatu do ponownego odczytania tego utworu, w wyniku czego nie zostaje on określony jako sztuka typowo awangardowa lub surrealistyczna, a raczej jako nowe zjawisko na scenie dramatycznej, czyli sztuka (neo)barokowa.

Słowa kluczowe: (neo)barok; teatr amerykański; Richard Foreman; Off-Off Broadway; gabinet osobliwości; teoria śmieci

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"Kiss me, Kiss me
When I am most ruined inside myself."
—Deep Bass Voice, *Panic! (How to Be Happy!)*[1]

I.

In *Unbalancing Acts: Foundations for a Theatre*, Richard Foreman presents an insight into the recesses of his idiosyncratic theatrical universe and elucidates the reasons why he should be considered a worthy descendant of such ground-breaking figures as Antonin Artaud, Jerzy Grotowski, Bertolt Brecht, or Peter Brook. As the creator of the Ontological-Hysteric Theatre company in New York City (1968), Foreman's position in and his impact on the contemporary off-off Broadway stage have been universally acknowledged. However, the critical attention devoted to the analysis of his dramatic works concentrates mainly on and documents most fondly the acrobatic experimentations with acting and difficulties with the very production of his avant-garde plays. Yet, it cannot be denied that what Richard Foreman does on and to the stage as a writer, director, stage designer, sound engineer, or lighting director—to name but a few of his artistic attributes—is perforce highly intellectual.

Being a conceptual artist, Foreman's spectacles focus on transforming conventional perception and recognition of objects by generating perplexity through denouncing all categories that are familiar, reassuring, and comforting for the spectator.[2] That defamiliarization which Foreman launches affects first the set design and the use of props. If taken separately, they all—clocks, chairs, tables—are most ordinary; however, when "pulled out of their familiar contexts, they create a sense of foreboding, or even terror akin to that of night-

[1] Richard Foreman, *Panic! (How to Be Happy!)*, in *Bad Boy Nietzsche and Other Plays* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2007), 166. Further references will be parenthetical. As there is no division into separate acts and scenes in the play, parenthetical references indicate page numbers of the 2007 edition of *Bad Boy Nietzsche! and Other Plays* by Richard Foreman.

[2] In her review of the play, Jenny Sandman describes Foreman's unconventional approach to stagecraft in a following manner: "he proudly eschews 'traditional' American theatre—that is, the sort of bland formulaic mush that produces a nice safe emotional catharsis, wrapped up in nice safe familiar story with no loose ends, that is then easily forgotten upon leaving the theatre. Foreman's is a true theatre of excess, one which cannot be summarized or translated into other media."

mares in which the everyday world becomes alien."[3] Additionally, Foreman claims that he aims at

> trying to function as an atomic physicist of the theatre, and just as dealing with tiny, nonmaterial atoms can lead to gigantic explosions in the realm of gross matter, [he] maintain[s] that if [the spectator] change[s] the scale of [one's] perceptual mind-set as [one] watch[es his] plays, the tiny atomic structure of [his] style can produce explosions in [one's] larger-scaled, psychological self. This lends a specific, therapeutic relevance to [his] Brownian-movement-kind-of-theatre; it enables [the spectator] to sense [one's] own life as harmoniously immersed within the atomic dance of each lived moment.[4]

This confrontation with Foreman's theatre is to induce an uncanny frustration in the spectator who, through the employment of "externalized double binds in [Foreman's] plays,… [is] demagnetize[d] … from normal avenues of conceptualization."[5] Thus "demagnetized," the spectator is then dragged into the vortex of the playwright's theatrical universe, where his plays "turn in on themselves, and then inward once more."[6] Such a conception of theatre resembles the unique acting of the baroque fold, which is "always folded within a fold, like a cavern in a cavern."[7] Hence, Foreman's works seem to represent fold-like elements of the labyrinthine theatrical universe that clearly exceed the space of the stage.

Panic! (How to Be Happy!), Foreman's 2003 theatrical "piece," written, directed, and designed by the playwright himself,[8] tests the conventional limits

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[3] Arnold Aronson, *Looking into the Abyss: Essays on Scenography* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 164.

[4] Richard Foreman, *Unbalancing Acts: Foundations for a Theatre* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1992), 28.

[5] Foreman, 8.

[6] Marc Robinson, *The Other American Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 155.

[7] Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, trans. Tom Conley (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 6.

[8] The most ebullient enthusiasts of Foreman's theatre fiercely oppose addressing him as the "playwright" and refuse to designate his stage creations as "plays" or "dramas", claiming that such conventional and mediocre labels do not befit so inventive and unconventional a creator. Instead, they prefer to consider Foreman, as Marc Robinson recalls in *The Other American Drama*, the creator of "pieces … [or] works that have wound up in the theatre only by accident" (150). Nevertheless, since Foreman self-consciously investigates the very process of writing and treats the stage productions of his works as material incarnations of the written texts, I will thus refer to *Panic!* as a "play" and to Foreman himself as a "playwright."

imposed by both the characters' bodies and the very structure of the theatrical stage. The present article proposes to re-appraise this composition as a new form of a theatrical work, that is, not a purely avant-garde or neo-surreal play, but a (Neo)Baroque dramatic phenomenon only seemingly restricted to and framed by the principles of spatial geometry. By celebrating the idea of fragmentation through the construction of the play and its short dialogues, and by accentuating and cherishing the creative potential of linguistic and set-design "rubbish," Foreman encompasses in his work both the (Neo)Baroque and surreal art, and transforms them into an altogether new category. I shall call that new type of a dramatic creation a (Neo)Baroque play.

Moreover, Richard Foreman seems to conduct a metaphorical, yet still scandalous, dissection of texts for performance and, at the same time, society itself as well, both of which obviously resist any disarray the playwright's subversive endeavors would initiate. What must be, nevertheless, pointed out is that it was already the Jacobean tragedy that "disclose[d] ideology as misrepresentation [and] interrogate[d] [it] from within, seizing on and exposing its contradictions and inconsistencies and offering alternative ways of understanding social and political processes".[9] Appositely, not only does the theatre of Foreman's question the bourgeois society's penchant for eliminating seemingly discordant components, but also discloses their indispensability for the existence of any social phenomenon. It thus comes as no surprise that *Panic! (How To Be Happy!)* abounds in characters (for instance the unpredictable female heroines) who, in their fragmentariness, all defy pre-determined social roles and traditional patterns of behavior.

II

When asked in one of the interviews about the structure of and an approach to his early plays, Foreman replied that "[t]he situations depicted were normal, bourgeois theatrical clichés, domestic triangles,"[10] thus also clarifying the decision about calling his theatre "Ontological-Hysteric". As has been already mentioned, from the very beginning of his artistic career Foreman has been dissecting the social body of the traditional, middle-class theatre, recognizing

[9] Jonathan Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy: Religion, Ideology and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and his Contemporaries* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 8.

[10] Foreman, *Unbalancing*, 75.

the basic drive that controls it as "hysteric in its psychological topology".[11] Nearly sixty years later, the spectacles he creates still refute the premises of the conventional bourgeois events,[12] and one of the most astounding twenty-first-century plays that embodies his theoretical foundations is *Panic! (How To Be Happy!)*. It seduces a spectator into the very core of the work's astonishing universe as early as in the initial stage directions. They frame the seemingly chaotic *mise en scène* of the play that also seems to resemble the seventeenth-century *Wunderkammer*, while the playwright himself appears to be a baroque polyhistor[13] carefully constructing an automaton-like, grotesque vision of the world both on and off the stage.

The appellation of "baroque" used in the context of Foreman's 21-century play seems to correspond with what Octavio Paz's identified as transgressions in the writings of Sor Juana, a 17th-century Mexican poet. Paz noted that both "the baroque and romanticism proclaimed an aesthetics of the abnormal and the unique; each presented itself as a transgression of norms. But while the romantic transgression center[ed] on the subject, the baroque transgression focuse[d] on the object."[14] Foreman's objects of investigation, that is, the stage with the automaton-like characters endows the play with a peculiar internal form—the (Neo)Baroque form—which, as Omar Calabrese specified, is to be associated with the categories "that powerfully 'excite' the ordering of the system, that destabilize part of the system by creating turbulence and fluctuations within it and thus suspending its ability to decide on values".[15] That instability of the system—a contemporary, technology-driven spectacle of global politics and culture, and the locality of embodiment—triggers the emergence of a new category, that is, of the (Neo)Baroque theatre, with Richard Foreman's *Panic!* being, I shall try to prove, one of its most remarkable representatives.

Panic! opens with the author's note that the play "was created from a series of simple phrases" (155) listed beneath this remark, and a positive encourage-

[11] Foreman, 75.

[12] Sadly, Mr Foreman passed away on January 4, 2025.

[13] I follow here a pre-Enlightenment concept of the term, according to which "the polymath, or polyhistor,… constituted the ideal of the baroque scientist"; Jan C. Westerhoff, "A World of Signs: Baroque Pansemioticism, the Polyhistor and the Early Modern Wunderkammer," *Journal of the History of Ideas* (2001): 633, https://doi.org/10.1353/jhi.2001.0041.

[14] Octavio Paz, *Sor Juana or, The Traps of Faith*, trans. Margaret Sayers Peden (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 53.

[15] Omar Calabrese, *Neo-Baroque: A Sign of the Times*, trans. Charles Lambert (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 26.

ment addressed to future directors to rearrange those groups of words freely and "build an original production, inventing an original scenario, from just these few phrases" (155). However, Foreman also forewarns that the names of the characters, together with the stage design itself, should not be altered. It might be assumed that what he in fact demands is to acknowledge the existence of the frame within which the exact spectacle unfolds. That is why, I would suggest, the stage directions reveal that either side of the stage is to be surrounded by "two tiers of dark blue curtains, much like the curtains of the berths of an ancient sleeping car, held open by string of pearls" (159). The confirmation of such a hypothesis can be found in Foreman's idea of the stage as "a reverberation chamber which amplifies and projects the music of the action so it can reveal the full range of overtones".[16] Thus, to satisfy such a challenging artistic demand, the Foreman stage is to be, quoting the playwright himself,

> an enclosed territory—whatever happens onstage bounces off the walls of the set, and is reflected back and forth between the objects that are positioned inside that space.… [Therefore,] I always start from the periphery. I begin by considering the outer walls the action is going to bounce against. That outer boundary is the crucial conceptual element, because in my plays I imagine the action as an impulse continually flung outward until it encounters a boundary, which then bounces it back to the center of the stage, coloring it with the particular quality of the wall it was thrown against.[17]

What also seems significant is the peculiarity of the play's frame-structure design since, as Marc Robinson observes, "none of many onstage exits leads anywhere except deeper into the same setting."[18] That frame construction is further amplified by the permeating gaze of the audience made up of the characters themselves, who also perform in the play in front of the so-called Mountain People that are strutting across the upstage.

An incessant play-within-the-play and, to quote William Egginton, the ensuing "split between interior and exterior audience, as well as the concomitant negotiation between those levels",[19] all clearly present in the play, immediately

[16] Foreman, *Unbalancing*, 57.

[17] Foreman, 57.

[18] Marc Robinson, "The Mind King Abdicates," review of *Panic! (How To Be Happy!)*, by Richard Foreman, *Theatre* 33, no. 3 (2003): 138, https://muse.jhu.edu/article/52179.

[19] William Egginton, *The Theatre of Truth: The Ideology of (Neo)Baroque Aesthetics* (Redwood, CA: Stanford UP, 2010), 42.

invoke the baroque spirit. As "perhaps the single most powerful marker of baroque aesthetics",[20] these formal aesthetic features are significantly reinforced by an excessively luxurious setting of the play. Stage directions stipulate that the stage floor be covered in Oriental rugs and confetti; painted eyes and a vulture, both baroque symbols,[21] as well as a toy train, should hang from the ceiling, whereas twelve large eighteenth-century porcelain dolls attached to the upper curtain are to be poised "like witnesses to the play" (159).

What is, however, most conspicuous is the presence of "a tall, two-story cabinet on wheels, striped gold and brown, with a door and a window" (159), which dominates the center of the stage, and where the characters seek refuge. Furthermore, by introducing several different voices heard over the loudspeakers, that is, a Deep Bass Voice, a Slurred Voice and a High-Pitched Voice, Foreman draws the audience's attention to both the external/visual representation and, simultaneously, to its textual/aural operations. The use of those "disembodied [offstage] narrative voices"[22] further defamiliarizes the already "[un]conventional practices of Foreman's dramatic representation".[23] Therefore, the extradiegetic device of incorporating disembodied voices not only interrupts and directs the characters, but also seems to frame the play within the system of an unending loop, thus organizing all dramatic events and drawing the audience's and the characters' attention to what an action generator considers particularly relevant.

Moreover, since the typescript makes it clear that those voices of authority are to be produced by Foreman/the director himself, it is thus the playwright or, as Robinson maintains, "the Foreman persona"[24] who, like the baroque *polyhistor* (polymath), is carefully creating his grotesque vision of the world on the stage. However, Foreman's method of constructing that "piece", built apparently on the concept of excessive randomness and contingency, conspic-

[20] Egginton, 42–43.

[21] The Baroque symbolism traditionally encompasses images such as those of the eye, mirror, crossroads, labyrinth, as well as vulture, or ruins, to name but a few. While the first group (the eye, mirror, crossroads, labyrinth) displays an obsessive attraction to "the multiplication of surfaces, contours, and folds—both to allude to a greater portion of space than what is visible and to produce movement (often dizziness in the witness or spectator) by the suppression of right angles, or linear contours" (Lambert, *The Return*, 18), the second (the vulture, ruins) evokes processes of decay and disintegration.

[22] Brian Richardson, "Voice and Narration in Postmodern Drama," *New Literary History* 32, no. 3 (2001): 686, https://doi.org/10.1353/nlh.2001.0042.

[23] Richardson, 687.

[24] Robinson, *The Other*, 151.

uously resembles the idea behind the structure of the seventeenth-century *Kunst-* and *Wunderkammer* (the curiosity cabinets). While discussing the Prague *Kunstkammer* of Emperor Rudolf II, Horst Bredekamp explains that the collection "restored its reputation as a museum with a clear, in some sense pre-Cartesian form of organization".[25] It catalogued and classified, Bredekamp continues, the objects from the mineral, vegetable, and animal kingdoms as *naturalia*; exquisite representatives of arts and crafts as *artificialia*; and devices "used to measure time and space"[26] as *scientifica*. Obviously, that late sixteenth-century model of the collection's hierarchical structure did not solely pertain or was not restricted only to the Prague model. However, Westerhoff clarifies that "it would be presumptuous to try to formulate a unique principle which explained the membership of each object in each individual *Wunderkammer*, given that a great amount of their constitution depended on the means and personal predilections of the collectors."[27] It might be therefore interesting to consider Foreman, the playwright, a reification of the early modern *polyhistor*—the collector assembling curiosities seemingly at random, i.e. at random from the perspective of the contemporary epistemology. This, in turn, is clearly in accordance with Westerhoff's concept of the "pansemioticism," which governed the baroque *Wunderkammer* form of presentation.

The pansemiotic view of signs and signification, prominent in the late sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe, held "that every object, whether natural or artificial signifie[d] one or several other objects (which c[ould] in turn be abstract qualities, virtues or vices, or particular states of affairs or events)".[28] Moreover, an intimate relationship between pansemioticism and polyhistorism was most evident in the existence of museum collections, or cabinets of curiosities. That being so, Foreman's play becomes a catalogue of the most astounding representatives of the *naturalia* ("a marble bust" [168], "the phallic stone" [186], "breadstick man" [192]), *artificialia* ("a tall, two-story cabinet on wheels, striped gold and brown, with a door and a window" [159], numerous swords, "a mirrored ball" [164], "a faceted golden ball"

[25] Horst Bredekamp, *The Lure of Antiquity and the Cult of the Machine: The Kunstkammer and the Evolution of Nature, Art and Technology*, trans. Allison Brown (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener Publishers, 1995), 34.

[26] Bredekamp, *The Lure of Antiquity*, 34.

[27] Jan C. Westerhoff, "A World of Signs: Baroque Pansemioticism, the Polyhistor and the Early Modern Wunderkammer," *Journal of the History of Ideas* (2001): 644, https://doi.org/10.1353/jhi.2001.0041.

[28] Westerhoff, 633–34.

[177], "jewelled goblets" [181]), and *scientifica* ("black-and-white checkered strings crisscross[ing] the stage" [159], numerous buzzers). Significantly, these objects are introduced in succession, strictly following the rule of the *Wunderkammer* construction.

Furthermore, the seventeenth-century fascination with and, subsequently, cult of the automaton[29] and "automatic mechanical motion which reached its agogee [*sic*] in the machines of the 18th century,"[30] made the moving statues the zenith of the *Wunderkammer* structure. That is why Foreman's meticulously constructed gallery of curiosities would not be complete without the four main automaton-like characters, dressed in multiple layers of clothing, who seem to bury, just like their seventeenth-century ancestors, "whatever natural selves they have under disguises as heterogeneous as their character names".[31] Indeed, the two women, Svetlana and Luminitza, the former being a peculiar type of the virgin bride in "a white baby doll dress and a black cap decorated with eggs" (159), the latter resembling a *femme fatale* in black, might indeed be regarded as Jacobean protagonists who confront the male power of Umberto, a pirate "with several blacked-out teeth" (159), and Nikos, "a primitive savage king with a kilt, cheetah-print vest, and a mane of fuzzy hair tumbling out from under a red fez" (161).[32] Yet, in striking contrast to the Elizabethan and Jacobean convention,[33] according to which the revelation of acts that "would not normally be spoken [or acted] aloud"[34]—and that concerns sexual acts as well—was conveyed through soliloquies or catch-singing, Foreman makes all violent and sexual acts explicit by enacting them directly on the stage, which is to be, in turn, bathed in the interplay of the bright light

[29] For further references to the historical development of the automaton and its influence on the contemporary digital culture see Kara Reilly's study *Automata and Mimesis on the Stage of Theatre Memory* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

[30] Bredekamp, *The Lure of Antiquity*, 2.

[31] Robinson, "The Mind," 139.

[32] A particularly amusing commentary on the characters Foreman brought into being in *Panic!* is provided by Michael Feingold in his review of the play, "Shanghaied Gestures," *The Village Voice*, Jan. 22, 2003, in which he identifies Nikos (played D. J. Mendel) as "a gruff Highland chieftain", Umberto (Robert Cucuzza) as "a Renaissance fop in a pink doublet", Svetlana (Tea Alagic) as "a virgin bride on the verge of Lammermoor madness", and Luminitza (Elina Löwensohn) as "a kohl-eyed seductress in black".

[33] For a detailed discussion of the Renaissance theatrical representations of eroticism, see *Erotic Politics: Desire on the Renaissance Stage*, ed. Susan Zimmerman (New York: Routledge, 1992).

[34] Una Ellis-Fermor, *The Jacobean Drama: An Interpretation* (New York: Vintage Books, 1964), 51.

and sudden violent shadows.[35] Those *chiaroscuro* contrasts seem to additionally magnify the almost already uncanny atmosphere of the play, simultaneously bespeaking the baroque painting.

The spectatorial pleasure of bourgeoise decorum is additionally disrupted by the characters' and their bodies' immunity to cruelty, shame and humiliation they are persistently exposed to. Both Nikos and Umberto are forced to kiss "the women's shoes, occasionally spitting out the dirt from the shoes that has gotten into their mouths" (165), whereas Luminitza and Svetlana are coerced into holding swords between their teeth as their hands are bound with chains by the Mountain People. Then, they have to "walk across the stage holding their tied hands in the air, as if in prayer" (163). Additionally, all acts of kissing in the play are accompanied by the exchange of swords between the female mouth and the male teeth. As Robinson points out,

> there is no nadir to the abjection, and certainly no sense that the self-sacrifice will lead to absolution, purification, much less the relief of oblivion. Far from it: the bodies are still intact, unchanged despite the masochism, as if their greatest torment is their own resilience.[36]

However, the moment Nikos attempts to rebel by questioning the actions he has to perform, the Slurred Voice reminds him kindly, yet firmly, that—being merely a figment of the author's imagination—he is supposed to follow obediently the instruction coming over the loudspeakers:

> Nikos *(Coming downstage and singing at the top of his lungs)*: It's not fair!
> *(All the others approach the blackboards and face them, with their backs to the audience. They lift the blackboards into the air. Nikos hesitates, again sings: "It's not fair," and then joins them and lifts a blackboard.)*
> Slurred voice:
> Follow the instructions you hear coming over the loudspeaker, please.
> *(The four of them drop the blackboards and step back from them, backing up downstage, where they collapse to the floor. They rise up slightly, staring at the letters on the blackboards.)* (184)

[35] For a feminist reading of Foreman's texts, see Jill Dolan's *Feminist Spectator as Critic* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1991).

[36] Robinson, "The Mind," 140.

It turns out that within the borders of the Foreman spectacle the characters performing on stage are subjected to the offstage narrative voices, which are contingent upon the whims of the "motion-master",[37] that is, the author himself.

What is more, the compulsive accumulation of objects on the stage, which include, for instance, biscuits, bizarre giant bees, antique marble busts, or a seesaw, does not result only in the play's claustrophobic aura. In fact, that visual claustrophobic excess the play offers seems to be designed for what Christine Buci-Glucksmann called "[t]he *baroque eye*, with its attention to multiplicity and discontinuity, [and which is] distinguished precisely by its infinite production of images and appearances".[38] That, in turn, refers me back to her idea of the Baroque world as grounded in the seeing of vision and the theatricalization of the sensible world, where "the stenography of drives subjects bodies [and I would add—of characters, actors, readers] to energetic thought which does not allow itself to be enclosed merely within the model of representation."[39] The visual excess the play offers also seems to correspond with the baroque concept of *horror vacui* which, according to David Castillo, "may be taken to mean something other than a mere cult of exuberance and decorative excess, a more fundamental feeling of attraction/revulsion concerning the idea of absence".[40] Thus approached, the intricate props also allow Foreman to "suggest, through their design, different ways that the performer can manipulate his body[; a]ll of the props and scenic elements are occasions for the exteriorization of internal impulse."[41] Therefore, by stopping to work

> from outlines, and instead let[ting] the complicated physical objects that [he] imagined lead [him] in whatever direction they suggested … [Foreman's plays], in an almost structuralist sense … would suggest how the given materials of a particular world create what we tend to think of as archetypal situations, precisely because those materials lend themselves to a series of possible manipulations that imaginatively suggest such archetypal forms.… [Thus, t]he

[37] Victoria Nelson, *The Secret Life of Puppets* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 49.

[38] Christine Buci-Glucksmann, *The Madness of Vision: On Baroque Aesthetics*, trans. Dorothy Z. Baker (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2013), 5; emphasis in the original.

[39] Buci-Glucksmann, *Baroque Reason: The Aesthetics of Modernity*, trans. Patrick Camiller (London: Sage Publications, 1994), 133.

[40] David R. Castillo, "Horror (Vacui): The Baroque Condition," in *Hispanic Baroques: Reading Cultures in Context*, ed. Nicholas Spadaccini and Luis Martín-Estudillo (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt UP, 2005), 87.

[41] Foreman, *Unbalancing*, 64.

> plays demonstrat[e] how our fantasy life, as well as our mental picture of the world, springs directly from the physical possibilities that are built into the objects with which we surround ourselves.[42]

Inundating the stage with all kinds of objects, which evidently borders on the visual clutter, Foreman seems to intensify the baroque idea of perpetual accumulative motion. Yet, the predilection for extravaganza and dynamism is only illusory because, as Robinson suggests, the play does impede its own development. While building to a *crescendo* of general chaos, the performance ends with a sense of "smothering stasis, undisturbed even by repeated acts of aggression, which is even more alarming than the aggression itself".[43] That horrifying "stasis" materializes in the inanimate figure of the Old Man in the Mountain represented by a single cut-off massive head, whose sadness, induced by the self-evident immobility, is marked by a large tear painted on his cheek.

This "study of immobility"[44] ends the moment the deep bass voice-over announces the appearance of the frightening "breadstick man", an anthropomorphic figure that might as well embody another disruptively indefinable idea. The "breadstick man" is a six-foot-tall "X" sign, made of two giant stale breadsticks with, as stage directions read, "a skull with red hair at its center and with tubes running from the skull to two tiny skulls at the top ends of the two breadsticks" (192). Interestingly, the chiasmatic structure of this mon-

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[42] Foreman, 80–81. Foreman explained that his formal experimentation with props was initiated in the 1971 piece, *Hotel China*, where he started to exploit "the psychic significance of objects [on stage]" (*Unbalancing*, 81). In this play, there was "a small house on a pulley system which ran across the ceiling of the stage, and the house would slowly float over the stage and sometimes drop to the floor. Then actors would get inside the house and look out its little window. They'd turn the house around so the back side, which was cut away, revealed its interior to the audience, with an actor squeezed inside. When the house was up in the sky, the performers would peer at it through telescopes. [Foreman] explored all potential uses of this house, and how each potential use would suggest a different psychological modality. [Foreman] would build a scene out of a particular psychological situation vis-à-vis the house, because the house itself suggested particular manipulations.… In *Hotel China* the floating house was echoed by a little house that was strapped to the forehead of one of the actors, as if it exuded directly from his mind—or perhaps he saw the world through the 'filter' of his acquired concept of 'house'; part of his mental baggage.… [His] new perspective … allowed [him] to use [for example] the lamp in such a way that the lamp said, 'I am a lamp. But I can also be a projectile that you hurl at your enemy. I could also be something that you can lay on its side and put ketchup on and try tasting to see if it tastes good.' It could be any one of innumerable possibilities" (*Unbalancing*, 80–81).

[43] Robinson, "The Mind," 140.

[44] Robinson, 138.

strous breadstick man, which invokes both convergence and divergence, constituting "not a loss of distinction, but a coming together in difference",[45] is created out of the objects previously used by the characters themselves and now should be treated as debris. If, however, an animate creature is constructed from rubbish, it might be thanks to the rubbish itself that the immobility of the drama can be shattered.

Michael Thompson's dynamic theory of rubbish provides a conceptual structure for value theory in which rubbish, debris and filth play the most conspicuous part. If, as Thompson argues, "[r]ubbish theory is general and dynamic in that it pictures both the boundary and the various possible transmissions across it,"[46] the uncanny "breadstick man" seems to be the visible, tangible sign of the instability of the system depicted in the play. What is more, Thompson maintains that the

> covert category of rubbish is not subject to the control mechanism (which is concerned primarily with the overt part of the system, the valuable and socially significant objects) and so is able to provide the path for the seemingly impossible transfer of an object from transience to durability.[47]

Therefore, having slid across the borders into the category of rubbish, the "breadstick man" in the last scene of the play seems to, quoting Thompson once more, "continue to exist in a timeless and valueless limbo";[48] consequently, it is possible that at some later date the mysterious creature will be provided with a chance of being discovered and re-evaluated. What is more, the very emergence of that chiasmatically structured "breadstick man" seems to both invoke and correspond with Bertolt Brecht's concept of "the wise man" who, as Benjamin signaled in the essay on the epic theatre, "is nothing but an exhibit of the contradictions which make up our society".[49] Unfortunately, when there occurs a possibility that the play's stasis can be overcome thanks to the "breadstick's man's" sudden appearance, the lights slowly fade into darkness.

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[45] Margrit Shildrick, *Embodying the Monster: Encounters with the Vulnerable Self* (London: SAGE Publications, 2002), 111.

[46] Michael Thompson, *Rubbish Theory: The Creation and Destruction of Value* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 88.

[47] Thompson, 9.

[48] Thompson, 10.

[49] Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. and intro. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zorn (London: Pimlico, 1999), 146.

One question persists notwithstanding: what space does, in fact, Foreman's play reside in? If, as MacDonald claims, it occupies the area somewhere between the perception of the event and the event itself,[50] I would suggest that the play might be located in the ambivalent transitive sphere of the throwaways. Moreover, the play's convoluted structure makes the audience equally unable to distinguish the level of reality at any given moment, and the play-within-the-play device so generously used in the piece draws the spectators into a hallucinatory vortex where the reason holds little sway and, like in the baroque world, madness, *id*, and abject are of paramount importance. Having thus based the premises of this play on both the visual and sensory excess, and the incessant clashes between the opposites, like opulence and lack, action and total immobility, as well as foregrounding abrupt shifts of perspective, Foreman assimilates the phenomenon of the baroque aesthetics to the context of the twenty-first-century American theatre, thus creating, I believe, his own peculiar (Neo)Baroque theatrical idiom.

The grounds for the formal experimentation that consists in bringing together such temporally distant aesthetic phenomena as the twenty-first-century theatre and seventeenth-century Jacobean aesthetics, which Foreman clearly undertakes, can be discerned in the baroque practice of "fusing" the diegetic sphere of the stage space, that is, the diegetic reality, into other realities represented, thus creating a hybrid entity—a practice known from creating an emblem in which the verbal merges with the visual. Initially cherished in the late sixteenth century exclusively in the realm of the theatre, the concept of "fusing realities" would extend its influence over other cultural and political phenomena such as absolutism and court life, finding a powerful and generous patron in the person of the Baroque monarch. Since then, thus mutually infused politics and aesthetics have come to be an inseparable part of the (Neo)Baroque sensibility. Appositely, José Antonio Maravall explicates that

> what the theologian[51] or the artist did corresponded to a political proposal, strategically if not in terms of its content. Individual conduct itself was considered subject to the categories of political conduct, as was attested to, for example, by applying concepts like "reason of state" or "statist" to private life.

[50] Erik MacDonald, *Theatre at the Margins: Text and the Post-Structured Stage* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 43.

[51] Maravall invoked the persona of the theologian to point out that it was the Church, and particularly the Catholic Church, especially in Spain, that had the "status as an absolute monarchical power"; Maravall, *Culture of the Baroque: Analysis of a Historical Structure*, trans. Terry Cochran (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 13.

> Acquaintance with the stratagems used by and against the individual constituted a theme necessarily attracting the attention of everyone to the extent that they were concerned about guiding an individual in some way and overcoming the individual's reserve vis-à-vis others—for the individual was well versed and cautious.[52]

That is why Maravall affirms that "the Baroque [could] not be abstracted as a period of art, nor even as a period of the history of ideas. It affected and belonged to the total ambit of *social history*, and every study of the subject matter, although legitimately becoming specialized, [had to] unfold by projecting itself into the entire sphere of culture."[53] The (Neo)Baroque poetics seems to be the embodiment of Maravall's postulate, and Foreman follows the same premises in his dramatic compositions; the theatrical pieces he constructs and stages embody the conflation of aesthetic preoccupation and political awareness of the subversive power of the theatrical art by translating Bataille's language and verbal imagery of "intoxication, festival, dance, avidity and ecstasy"[54] into his idiosyncratic, multimodal and multidisciplinary (Neo)Baroque visual idiom.

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[52] Maravall, 59.

[53] Maravall, *Culture of the Baroque*, 13; my emphasis.

[54] Gavin Parkinson, *Surrealism, Art and Modern Science: Relativity, Quantum Mechanics, Epistemology* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 140.

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